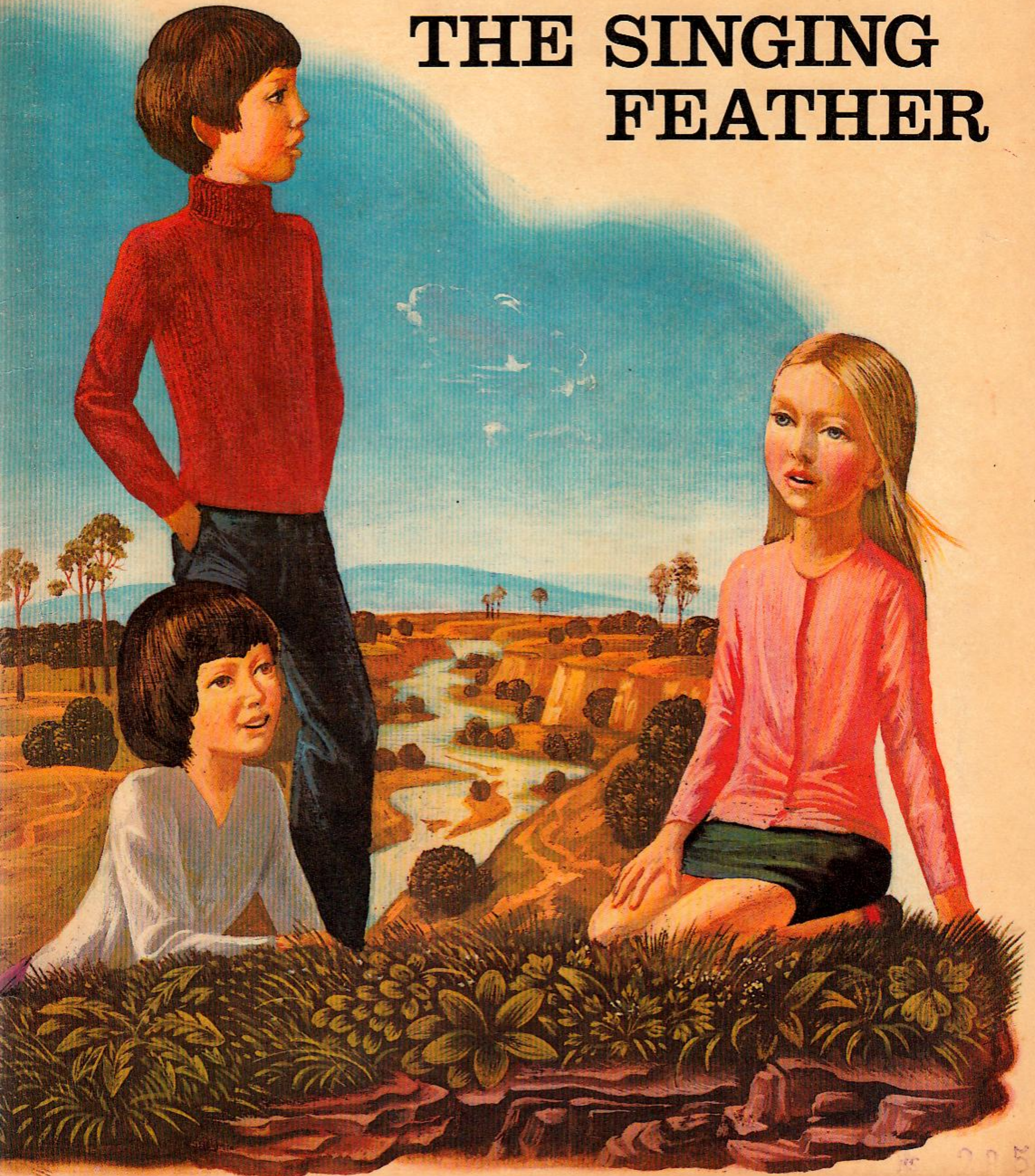


Vasily  
Sukhomlinsky

# THE SINGING FEATHER











# Vasily Sukhomlinsky THE SINGING FEATHER

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## I Want to Have My Say

Schoolmistress Katerina had taken her young class into the fields. It was a still morning in early autumn. Faraway in the sky was a flock of migrating birds. They were softly trilling and shrouding the fields in sadness.

Katerina was telling the children,

'Today we are going to make up an essay on the autumn sky and migrating birds. Each of you will say how the sky looks to you. Now, look carefully, children. Put it exactly and beautifully in your own words.'

The children fell silent. They gazed at the sky and thought hard. A moment later the first little essays broke the silence,

'The sky is very blue...'

'The sky is light blue...'

'The sky is clear...'

'The sky is lilac...'

That was it. Over and over the children savoured the same words: very blue, light blue, lilac, clear... Little blue-eyed Valya was standing quietly to one side.

'You're very quiet, Valya,' said the teacher.

'The sky is gentle,' said Valya softly, with a sad smile.

The children were quiet. And then in a flash they saw something they had not seen before.

'The sky is sad...'

'The sky is troubled...'

'The sky is mournful...'

'The sky is very cold...'

The sky played games, shimmered and breathed like a living being, and the children gazed into its wistful clear blue autumnal eyes.







## I'm Not Afraid of Thunder or Lightning

It was a hot day in June. Form Five was spending the day in the woods.

What fun the forest was! The children played games, read their favourite books and cooked porridge over a camp fire.

Towards evening black clouds suddenly rose up from behind the trees, and thunder rumbled across the sky. Straightaway the children rushed towards some shepherds for shelter. And little Vitya ran along with them.

All of a sudden, however, lightning flashed and a deafening crack of thunder rent the air; at once Vitya sank down trembling beneath a large oak, screwed up his eyes and was on the verge of tears. He had already opened his mouth to call for help when he saw his classmate Valya appear beside him.

'Is it you, Vitya?' she cried. 'Oh, thank goodness I'm not alone. I'm not so scared now.'

Vitya sucked in his breath and glanced around. The woods were drenched in torrents of rain. Lightning flashed, momentarily illuminating the trees and shrubs in a purple glow. The forest swayed and groaned. It seemed to Vitya that he and Valya were the only people in the world. He was too ashamed now to be frightened. How can you be afraid when you have a girl with you and you have to look after her?


'Don't be frightened, Valya,' said Vitya. 'I'm not afraid of thunder or lightning.'

He patted her blond plait and was not a bit afraid any more.









## Why Petrik Wept

Mother left little Petrik home when she went to the baker's.

While she was gone, Petrik went over to the open window.

A vase was standing on the window sill.

And a large multicoloured butterfly had landed on the vase's rim. Petrik so much wanted to catch the butterfly. He cupped his hands, clambered onto the sill, reached out and knocked the vase over. It fell and smashed to pieces.

Poor Petrik was frightened. What was he to do? What would Mother say?

He gathered up the pieces, took them into the garden and buried them with a little spade. Then he sat by the window waiting for Mother's return.

As soon as Mother opened the door, he rushed to her and blurted out,

'Mother, it wasn't me who broke the vase, it wasn't me who took the pieces into the garden and buried them with my little spade.'

Petrik could sense trouble in his mother's eyes.

'Then who broke the vase?' asked Mother.

'A butterfly,' he replied softly.

Mother smiled.

'I can understand a butterfly smashing a vase,' she said. 'But how did it carry the pieces into the garden and bury them with a spade?'

Petrik looked at his mother and began to cry.









## What's Best?

There was once a little girl who loved asking questions.

'What's best?' she would ask her mother. 'Apples or pears? Roses or gladioli? Water or lemonade? Ball or doll?'

Her mother answered patiently, though she did have her doubts. How can you say what's best out of a ball and doll, a rose and gladiola?

There came a day when the little girl asked, 'Mother, what's best: fairy tales or songs?'

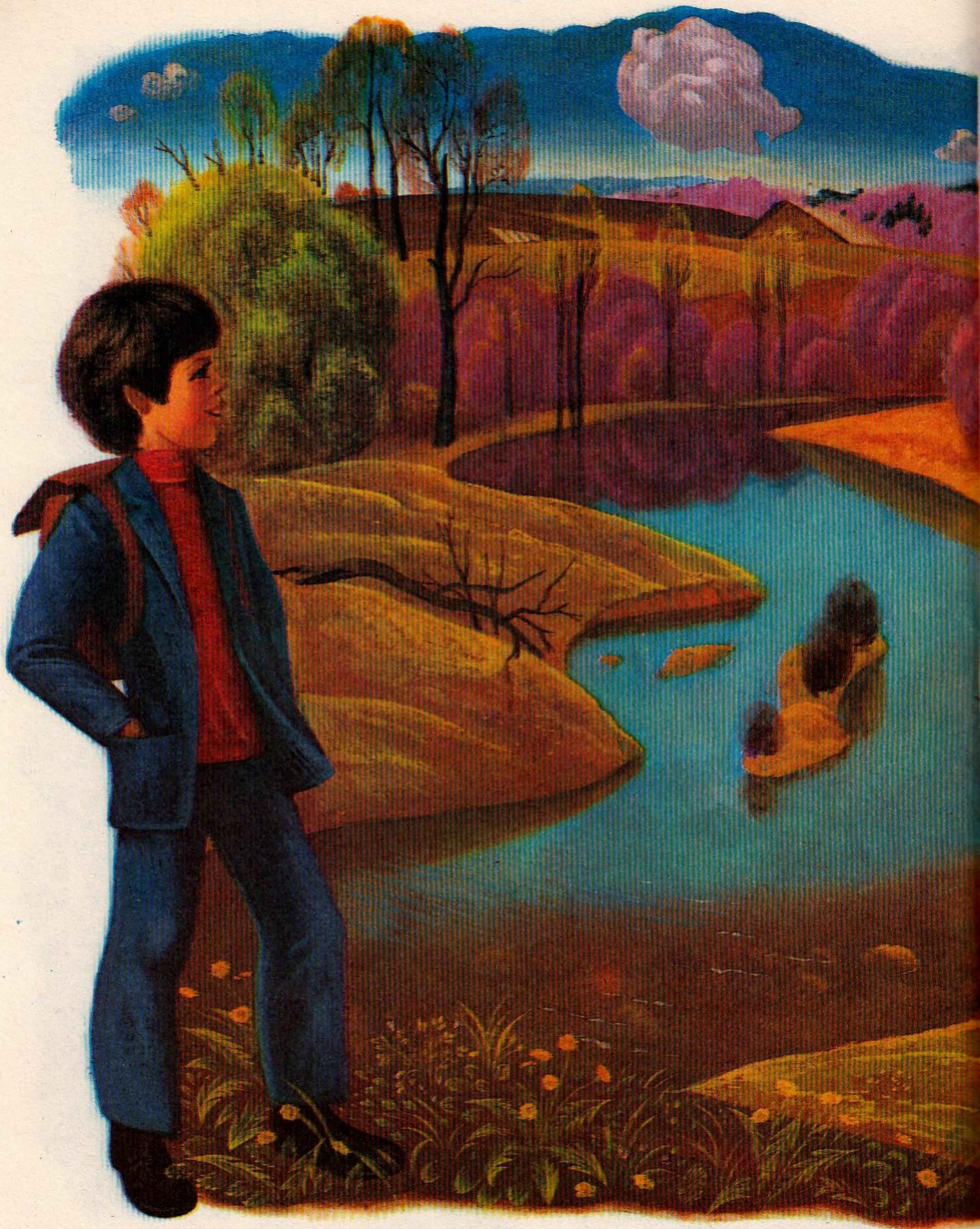
'Just you tell me what's best, the sun or sky,' Mother said. 'And if you can answer that, I'll tell you what's best out of fairy tales and songs.'

The little girl thought long and hard, but it was no use. She gazed up at the sky and the bright round sun. They were so beautiful and quite inseparable.


After that the little girl no longer asked what's best. She had another question: what's best about fairy tales? What's best about songs?

And Mother was delighted to tell her.









## Wolf's Head or Flower?

Two young boys Sergeika and Mikola were on their way home from school.

Sergeika was happy. He had given his teacher three correct answers that day, and got full marks.

But Mikola was sad and miserable. The teacher had twice called him out to the front. He had answered badly and had poor marks written in his exercise book. And the teacher had told him she would tell his mother about his marks when she saw her.

It was a warm spring day. The sun was shining and a fluffy white cloud was drifting across the deep blue sky. Gazing at the cloud Sergeika said,

'Look, Mikola, what a lovely cloud that is. It is just like a white rose. See how it spreads its petals, so slender and fine; how they flutter gently in the breeze.'

Mikola took a long hard look at the cloud, then mumbled to his friend,

'I don't see any petals. Nor a flower. The cloud is like a wolf. Can't you see its head on one side? The wolf has opened its evil jaws as if it's about to eat you.'

The boys stared up at the cloud, and what each one saw was in keeping with what he felt.







## Why the Bluebird Cries

In a cottage at the edge of the village there lived a man and woman. And they had two children, a little boy named Misha and a little girl named Olya. Misha was ten, Olya nine.

A tall, branchy poplar grew beside the house. 'Let's make a swing on the tree,' Misha said one day.

'How lovely to have a swing,' exclaimed Olya in delight.

So Misha shinned up the poplar and tied a rope to a sturdy branch.

Misha and Olya both stood on the swing and began to move to and fro.

As the children were swinging back and forth, a little bluebird flew above their heads, singing gaily.

Misha said to his sister,

'The bluebird too is happy to see us on the swing.'

Olya glanced at the tree trunk and noticed a little hollow in which there was a tiny nest; and in the nest lay some baby birds.

'No,' she said. 'The bluebird isn't happy, it is crying.'

'What's it crying for?' said Misha in surprise.

'Just think why,' replied Olya.

Jumping down from the swing, Misha looked up at the bluebird's little nest and only then realised why the bluebird was crying.











## The Eternal Poplar

By the roadside stands an ancient poplar. In the wintertime it tosses its barren branches, and in springtime it covers itself in verdant foliage. For as long as I can recall it has been standing as a sentinel. Once I asked my mother,

‘How old is our poplar? Who planted it?’

‘I don’t know,’ said Mother. ‘For as long as I can recall it has been standing by the roadside.’

So I asked Granddad,


‘Tell me, Granddad, how old is our poplar? Who planted it?’

‘I don’t remember,’ he replied. ‘It’s always been standing by the roadside. It goes on growing and pleasing everyone. It must have been a good man who planted it. I seem to recall when I was a lad playing beneath it, and your mother plaited garlands with her girl-friends by it; and now you too are playing in its shade.’









## The Persistent Ant

A tiny coal-black ant was scuttling along. Running home. He was carrying a little poppy seed to his baby ants. All of a sudden he saw, lying on the path, a pumpkin seed: big, sweet and fragrant. So the tiny ant set down his poppy seed, hauled the pumpkin seed upon his back, but could not hold it. The seed tumbled off. Once more the ant lifted it onto his back. But again it slipped off. He picked up the seed many times, yet it kept tumbling and slipping off again.

All at once the ant heard a voice: someone was giggling softly.

As he glanced round he saw a dragon-fly sitting by the wayside.

'You've picked up the seed a thousand times,' the dragon-fly said. 'You must be tired by now. You're not going to manage it anyhow. Why don't you give up and let it be?'

At that the ant replied,

'You only give up when you fail.'

And once more he tried to pick up the seed. This time he placed it firmly on his back and carried it off home. Not once did it slip.

That is how persistent is the ant.









## My Mother Is the Most Beautiful of All

Mother owl had a baby owl. He was big, grey-winged, round-eyed and wide-mouthed.

Owls only fly at night. They are frightened of the bright sunshine. So Mother owl was teaching her son,

‘Don’t leave the hollow in the daytime. The sun will blind you and you won’t find your way home.’

Being a disobedient little owl, her son crawled out of the nest, screwed up his eyes and flew across the meadow. There he opened his eyes, gazed into the sun and was blinded straightaway.


Sitting on the grass, he softly wept. By and by a heron wandered by.

‘Whose are you?’ it asked.









## Fire and the Baby Sparrow

Old Mother sparrow at last allowed her little son to fly from the nest. Twittering in amazement, the baby sparrow kept on at his mother: 'What's this? What's that?'

His mother explained all about the ground, the grass, trees, hens, geese and the pond. But, all of a sudden, the baby sparrow caught sight of a huge fiery ball up in the sky and asked,

'And what might that be?'

'It is the Sun,' Mother sparrow said.

'And what's the Sun?' the baby sparrow persisted.

'Now what do you want to know that for?' squawked the wise old sparrow. 'That is fire.'

'I wish to know what fire is,' trilled the baby sparrow, flying up and up and up, onwards to the sun high in the sky.

On and on he flew until he scorched the little feathers of his wings. In alarm, he flew back quickly. His poor mother was so worried for him she could not speak a word.

'Well, at least I know what fire is,' said the little sparrow.









## Lazybones and the Sun

On a hot summer's day Lazybones went for a walk in the woods. He lay down in a shady glade and fell asleep upon the soft grass.

While he slept, the Sun made her long journey up the incline of the sky and reached the summit. Once there she flooded the glade with her bright sunrays; and Lazybones felt her heating his head and toes. He would have liked to have risen and moved into the shade where the grass was cool, but it was too much bother.

So he said to the Sun,

'Dear Sun, move aside, please, I'm too hot.'

The Sun's happy laughter rang round the glade.

'How silly to think that the Sun will move where Lazybones wishes,' she cried.

Thereupon Lazybones grew angry and shouted, 'So you won't move, won't you?'

'I don't intend to,' replied the Sun.

'Right,' said Lazybones, 'then just to spite you I shall go on lying here!'









## The Singing Feather

What an amazing bird is the snipe. It sings... And do you know what it sings with? Its wing. It has a special singing feather in its wing. As the snipe flies along, and feels like singing, it arranges its wings so that the singing feather vibrates and sings a song. It gives out a shrill, quite incomparable whistle, rather like the sound of the top violin string as the bow moves across it, or the song of the wind in a slender reed stem.

One day, however, misfortune came. The snipe lost its singing feather. It fell out and floated to the ground. And when the snipe felt like singing it had no feather to sing with.

The snipe's singing feather was found by a little boy, whose name was Sergei. He picked it up and ran along, with the feather bursting into song. But when the snipe heard the singing of its own feather, it flew down to the little boy and asked him for it back.

'I cannot live without my song,' it said.

In wonder, Sergei gave the snipe back its singing feather.

The man who grew up from little Sergei lived for many years. And several times when he recalled the snipe, he reflected to himself that every person has his own singing feather. How sad it would be to lose it.



**В. Сухомлинский**

ПОЮЩЕЕ ПЁРЫШКО

*На английском языке*

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